183
181 The Bambara has a very highly developed sense of this idea of justice and there is nothing he resents more than injustice or a denial of justice. His resentment is stubborn and his vengeance, which may be deferred under a show of indifference, is implacable. The chronicle of Ségou is rich in pertinent examples. There was Ngolo Dyara, bringing murder and disaster on his own relatives in order to satisfy his hatred for having been sold into slavery by his uncle and not ransomed by any of his relatives. There was Kégné Mari who, watching the murder of Touro-koro in the Komo wood, expressed his vengeance finally fulfilled by saying: "Remember how, falsely accusing me of adultery with one of your wives, you had me lashed? And how on that day I told you that even though I were lying on the ground, if I could touch you with my foot, I would lay you low? Here at last is the day of my vengeance!" Similar examples are innumerable.

If he is powerless against injustice, the Bambara will wait patiently and, each time he has to speak, will dissimulate his weakness in formulas which have a double meaning, such as
[195] O do!, meaning "That's it!" O nya-na, meaning "Oh well!" Tigi!, meaning "That's true"; and other similar expressions. At the same time, he is repeating to himself his proverb: don' m'i fantan', a bla k'a teme, meaning "Don't pay attention while you are weak," that is, "Wait until I am strong enough to take vengeance (lit., to pay you back)."

181 This instinctive feeling for justice accounts, in a certain measure, for the family bonds made up of reciprocal rights [131]
571 and duties between parents and between them and their children
626 and, by an analogy of which we shall see other examples, between master and slave and between chief and subject. The obligation to respect all pacts concluded in the form of vows, oaths or fraternal alliance rests on the same basis. And it is the same notion that inspires the repression of acts which are almost universally condemned: perjury, treason, false witness, slander,
[691] theft and murder. It sustains the tireless persistence of the pleader who will go through endless lawsuits to obtain redress for a wrong done to him or to one of his people. And it gives strength to public vengeance against the sorcerer.

183 Thus used, taboo has organized and transformed the
784 native milieu; it has established a line of demarcation between the sacred and the profane by removing from ordinary intercourse persons, places and objects connected with the invisible and considered to be impregnated by it. However, since by its very nature it forms an incontestable and nonappealable law, it has been the favorite means of anyone in authority wishing to impose his will without fear of protest. Thus the laity has, so to speak, had to submit to a arbitrary system of law that is essentially religious. Social regulations, rules of hygiene, medical prescriptions, culinary preparations, forms of courtesy -- all these are surrounded with taboos and all have absorbed from the tne the very essence of its vitality and its constraining force.

784 Within the family, which is the generating force of any
593 collective group, the individual finds himself surrounded by taboos throughout his life. They are what establish and maintain the authority of the elders (koro-u) and especially of their head (fa). Taboos impose ancestral traditions which have developed separately and become gradually superimposition from earliest times to the present, the whole of which constitutes, in fact, family custom.

784 Patriarchy, brotherhood, the state, and all Bambara
[571] collectivities operate in the same way, since all collectivities are in a sense modeled on the natural family.

Religion, family, and society as a whole, in short the whole of Bambara civilization, have been and continue to be largely dependent on the tne.

[133] 3. Mantic, Religion and Magic

787 Mantic. Among the Bambara, as among all the Sudanese, religion and magic are both based on a belief in a permanent revelation which the manes, the spirits and the gods give to men with regard to the events of their lives.

The various means by which man can come to know this revelation on the part of invisible beings are what is called divination or mantic. This is extra-rational knowledge since it makes known things which could not be learned through reason

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789 emanating from the person or object impregnated with magic force acts as if it were a part of that person or object. Often
[788] the magician or [154] ritual officiant spits on the person or object involved in the rites. This is a means of transferring one person's fluid to another.

Conversely, it is vital to know how to avoid contact
751 with, or even emanations from, a maleficent magic force.
787 That is the reason for the great number of mysterious magic
754 practices and the secret of the innumerable amulets that form so many shields, to be placed presumably where they will best protect against any blow. Therefore it is the magician's prerogative to make amulets and to prescribe the conduct necessary to preserve their efficacy.

It should be noted that protection set up against a given person is good only for him and is useless against a successor, for instance. The chronicle tells us that Bani, chief of Samba-Nyana, was successful in using certain artifices to prevent Ma-n-son from conquering him. But, kept in ignorance of Ma-n-son's death and having taken no precautions against Da, Ma-n-son's son and successor, Bani was conquered by Da, against whom his artifices availed nothing.

If one is caught in spite of precautions, what is to be done? Everyone is afflicted in one way or another in any event. A Bambara is always inclined to believe in some sort of supernatural intervention. He has on hand some sort of remedy, but more often he resorts to a "seer" for guidance or, if the case requires, to a magician's skill.

Native medicine is a mass of magic formulas and of remedies strikingly reminiscent of the pharmacopeia of the Middle Ages (see, in the foregoing, father Niany's operations).

[571] The individual does not live as an isolated unit but
789 rather as an integral part of a community. In the society in
783 which he lives, however restricted it may be, he progressively occupies various situations. On both physical and moral levels, he undergoes changes and, depending on circumstances, whether fortunate or unfortunate happenings, changes take place within him. In short, his magic potential varies. These variations are always believed to concern the entire milieu, upon which they may (in the case of illness or death) have disastrous effects.

789 The individual is therefore required to [155] undergo proper
783 treatment to return him to his normal, harmless state.

789 From this point of view, social life seems to give rise
788 to a series of rites involving the disintegration and reintegra-
182 tion or the aggregation of the individual in relation to the group in which he lives. Birth, circumcision, marriage, illness, death and the performance of certain trades are all modes of existence, whose beginning and end usually involve three stages: separation from the common milieu, accomplishment of the act, and reintegration into the former milieu or aggregation in a new milieu. Between the first and the second state as well as between the third and the fourth there exists usually a kind of negative interval which we call marginal. This system, which comes to light upon an analysis of multiple facts, is actually subject to modifications or alterations which can change its physiognomy. Nevertheless, the basis of these ritual sequences is so well established that by comparing external manifestations with the theoretical system it is possible to understand them better and to restore to some of them, which have become badly mutilated, their real meaning, which the native is usually, if not always, unable to explain or to define precisely.

A detailed study of institutions will give an opportunity for concrete analysis of these ritual sequences, which a kind of age-old empiricism has transformed into laws of a sort. They have come to represent that part of custom which has acquired a kind of permanence by virtue of public acceptance.

It is apparent everywhere among the Blacks that events of a general character (birth, coming-of-age, marriage, illness and death) are surrounded by ritual practices that vary outwardly from place to place but may all fit our theoretical system of three stages with marginal periods. All denote a common basis of magic and all derive from a long-tried empiricism which has given them a peculiar and relatively stable physiognomy in terms of the milieu with which the rites are connected.

● 571 What we have just said about individuals must also ap-
182 ply to collective groups: the latter deal with each other or

571 with individuals in the same way as individuals deal with
182 each other. They are not only moral persons, as we put it, but they are truly persons, [156] as evidenced by the Blacks' impulsive need for anthropomorphism.

812 Let us note, finally, that a Black does not abstract himself from surrounding nature; nor has he reached the stage of development at which man regards himself as a kind of intermediary between the natural and the supernatural. The Black is an integral part of nature and that is why he treats it like himself. Therefore, natural phenomena are subjected on his behalf to the same kind of ritual sequences as those followed in his own behavior.

Chapter 3

Communities

1. General Considerations

114 Native society is not simple, and Europeans studying
631 these countries have used terminology which, not being defined, has obscured reality.

In particular, they have used the terms "kingdom" and "empire" to describe Sudanese states, and both authors and readers have taken these expressions to imply a social organization more or less analogous to those meant by these words in our country.

631 These empires or kingdoms, however, are simply clans, i.e., political groups that have imposed their authority on other groups whose members then become their tributaries, members of a caste, or slaves. Such an empire, if one wishes to use this term, has no exact geographical boundaries or, if one prefers, its boundaries are constantly changing. Furthermore, the country embraced by this term has two parts: territories which may be said to be under direct administration, in which the authority of the clan is directly imposed; and those territories whose position with respect to the ruling clan

614 fa (2), according to whether the group itself is meant or the
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> 2. Fa means "lord," "master," "patriarch," or "father," depending on the circumstances. Within the family, it corresponds very closely to the titular incumbent of such rank and high office who led Mistral [Ed., a French poet] to call his father: "my lord father," or "the master."

place which this collectivity occupies.

571 Let us note at the start that any collectivity forming
575 an association is a ton'; thus, this is the case for all persons under the authority of one fa, and from this point of view, each of them is a ton'-den', literally, "a child of the ton'," i.e., member of the ton'. The word ton'-denya derives from the same word and is commonly used as a collective designation for all the members of the same ton'. This is the equivalent of the French word [159] société [Ed., society, association] or confrérie [Ed., brotherhood, confraternity]. The head of the ton' is the ton'-tigi, a term by which honor is paid to the head of an important family, and which, in some respects, is the equivalent of our [Ed., French] words notable [Ed., person of note, dignitary] and notabilité [Ed., notability, principal person].

614 If one considers the family as an association of the
596 issue of the same parents, the term ba-denya is used, derived from ba-den'. Since the word ba means "mother" and, in the broad sense, "progenitor," mother or father, the word ba-den' is used for any of their issue, hence "children," "brothers," and "relatives," while ba-denya means "fraternity" "kinship."

Although, in the restricted sense in which we shall use it, the word ton' refers to anyone living under the authority of the ton'-tigi, whether or not he is connected by descent, the more exact term, ba-denya, refers only to those whose

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being born; bolo-ko literally means "affair involving birth."

etymologically mean "birth."

Having entered the family through physical birth, a child enters a new phase of his life through the spiritual birth represented by the soli. Through this rite, a child in fact ceases to belong to sexless childhood and becomes: the boy, a man; the girl, a woman. Let us look at the stages of this change of status which is truly the principal event of a native's life.

857 Until he is about seven years old, a small boy lives in daily contact with his mother, only slipping away, as time goes on, to play nearby with his friends.

During this period, one can already observe the influence [235] of the native milieu on the development of his young soul. He has watched cult and magic practices, and he too plays at being a magician to kill or capture rats, lizards, and other small animals for his little feasts. He collects roots with simulated rites and attaches them to his toy bow so as to ensure the success of his hunting, believing that he has attracted a spirit by promising an offering of the blood of his victims. He is already a little hunter, seeking mysterious procedures through which game can be and ought to be put at his mercy without danger to himself.

881 Around the age of seven, he is thinking about the crucial
794 act of his life, the soli, one of whose rites is that of circumcision.

Observance of the soli, complete with public circumcision and preceded and followed by membership in a brotherhood, is not absolutely indispensable. When, by reason of circumstances, a child lives in an isolated situation, he undergoes the soli within the family circle, without fuss, and this in no way lessens the validity of the act.

881 There is no doubt, however, that nothing but absolute
794 necessity will make a Bambara do this; he loathes such wretched
561 economy, which in any case seems inappropriate to such an im-
571 portant occasion (1). On the contrary, he loves to take part in

1. Besides, since no exact age limit is

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imposed and since there may be as much as six or seven years' difference in age between the oldest and youngest children participating in the same soli, it is obviously possible for a candidate to arrange to be included at some point within this range of ages so as not to be an isolated case.

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a noisy demonstration and to share in all of the rejoicing the brotherhoods provide for their members. This is by no means the least of the reasons for the spread of these brotherhoods, to which the n-Tomo (2) is really the front door, since no one is

2. n-Tomo is the term used in the Ségou area; in Kaarta the term n-Tori is used.

admitted to a brotherhood unless he is soli-ma, and the specific final object of the n-Tomo is the soli.

n-Tomo

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The n-Tomo is an association which, in preparation for the soli, bands together boys (3) of about seven to fourteen years

3. Little girls have no organized society to prepare them for the soli, but they have agreements among themselves and, in addition, are chosen as n-golo-moso-u by the n-Tomo-den'-u.

Each [236] n-Tomo normally includes all the boys due to be circumcised, without distinction by race or rank. Each member is called n-Tomo-den'; the eldest is the leader or n-Tomo-tigi, and he is assisted by a syere or "follower." New members are received every year at the time of the annual festival, and they must pay an entrance fee (a chicken) and a few cowries

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575 A fla-n-ton' usually includes the young people from three consecutive soli, so it is an assemblage of three fla-m-bolo. Thus, Bambara society is composed of a certain number of fla-n-ton', and all the people are distributed among them, from the most recent tye-kura (new men) to the tye-koro (elders) who are the most advanced in age, [249] Since the women also have their fla-n-ton', it is reasonable to say, from a certain point of view, that the soli is the basis of life and of the social organization.

•[571] Each fla-n-ton' is independent, but it maintains the best of relations with its immediate neighbors, the one preceding it, the one following it, and the one of the women of the same soli. Thus, the fla-n-ton' have a certain solidarity among them, which is shown by the custom of each fla-n-ton' honoring its immediate neighbors by offering them some of the food from its corporate meals. It should be noted, also, that whenever discord arises within a fla-n-ton', the neighboring fla-n-ton' intervene to make peace; a special arbiter may even be chosen to smooth out the difficulties involved in such an affair (1).

1. In this connection, note the difficulties between the ton' of Kassoum and Biton as reported in the chronicle of Ségou above.

Wherever he goes, a Bambara will look up people of his own age, i.e., those who went through the soli at the same time. He can always count on their friendly welcome and practical help.

In each fla-n-ton' there is a chief, ton-tigi, chosen in various ways depending on the place and the people. He may be the son of a notable; he may be a house slave. A syere (follower) assists him or replaces him. A dyala-tige, or assigner of shares, has the function of enforcing discipline and distributing the food at the group banquets; this is usually a house slave. Finally, a ton-dyeli serves as general factotum and herald; a person of caste has this role. From the point of view of the

608 his ally had to try to ransom him. A sénanku often serves as inter-
621 mediary in arranging marriages, in land claims, in the collection of
648 debts. He is rewarded by gifts. He has the power to stop quarrels and to oppose acts of rage and violence by the man whose sénanku he is, no matter what his rank and no matter how important the decisions in question are. The sénanku of a Fama could prevent his declaring war or condemning to death one of his subjects. Moreover, he has certain limited privileges over his ally's possessions. (He may appropriate unimportant objects, food, and even sums of money.) Finally, he recruits the labor force which his ally may need.

c. Age Classes. -- But though these different ties exercise an
621 important influence on the political, social, and religious life of the
571 community they are generally too broad and too lax to permit organiza-
561 tion of a work community. In fact, we have seen how a large village may be formed of different communities relatively independent of each other, despite the authority of the founding community's fa. On the level of the canton, the geographical dispersion does not permit the Fama to intervene personally in the organization of the work community. The latter is founded essentially on the system of relations of the age classes.

561 From infancy until circumcision for the boys, until excision for the girls, the young Bambara belongs to a hierarchic society which prepares him or her for this ceremony and which provides an education complementary to that received in the family. Within this association all the children are divided into age classes: boys up to six years of age are bilakoro-dogomani (bila = short pants), from 6 to 10 years they are bilakoro-dogoma, from 10 to about 15 years, bilakoro-koroba. Similarly, the girls are, successively: sunkiri-dogomani, sunkuru-dogoma, and sunkuru-koroba. Each age class has a chief: ton-tigi for the boys, musso-tigi for the girls; each office is doubled by a deputy (syere). There is also a treasurer and a ton-dyeli who is the griot of the ton. All are elected by members of the society. A Bambara will be influenced all his life by his membership in a certain age class which groups all the children who underwent circumcision at the same time. In fact, up to the moment of circumcision the child's personality is not yet distinct. We have seen before how small children were